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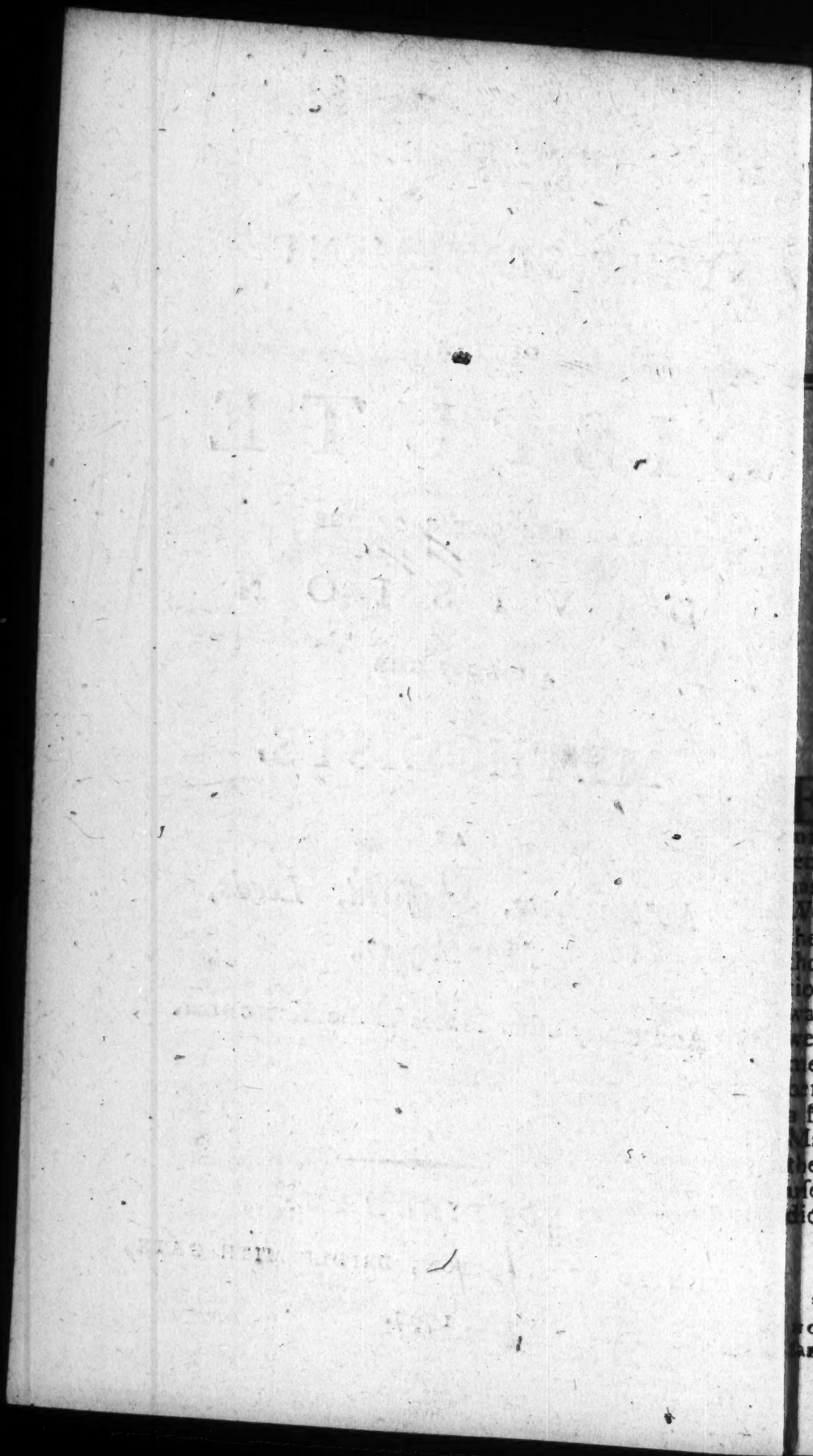
A
BRIEF STATEMENT
OF THE
DISPUTE
AND THE CAUSE OF THE
DIVISION
AMONGST THE
METHODISTS,

AT
*Nottingham, Sheffield, Leeds,
Manchester,*
And many other Places in the KINGDOM.

NOTTINGHAM:

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1797.



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BRIEF STATEMENT.

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EVERY person of reflection that has had the means of information on the subjects that are the cause of the present dispute; will have perceived that this dissatisfaction has existed many years. During the last part of Mr. Wesley's life, the form of Church Government amongst the Methodists was borne with as a temporary evil, but though the people were unwilling to attempt any alteration in his time, their attention as might be expected was much directed to it at his death, and expectations were generally entertained that a liberal form of government would then be adopted. At this period those embers that had for many years been smothered broke into a flame that has existed in one form or another ever since. Many have long ago predicted these events,* and had the preachers been possessed of the same foresight, and used the precautions that common prudence would have dictated unto them, they would have prevented the present

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* Mr. Wesley himself has formerly given it as his opinion, that NO MAN OR NUMBER OF MEN would ever be suffered to use the same authority that he had always done.

lent disasters, by making proper concessions and alterations in those parts of their oeconomy that are found to be obnoxious to the people.

There has been ever since the commencement of Methodism a yearly meeting of preachers called a Conference, that has hitherto assumed the power of regulating the affairs of all the societies in the kingdom. By this assembly all laws have been formed, all money matters transacted, and all affairs relative to the preachers and the people determined. But this assembly has always consisted of the preachers only, no other person whatever has for many years been admitted into it; every thing there transacted with the most entire secrecy, and moreover this secrecy is on particular occasions enjoined on the preachers by a solemn adjuration of the president. It may be also further observed of this assembly, that it chooses all the members that constitute its own body without even consulting the people, who have no voice in the choice of their own ministers.* But the conference in the fullest sense excludes them from having any share whatever in those important transactions in which they are peculiarly interested. The mandates of this *self-elected and self-created body*, are also as extraordinary as the source whence they proceed. For as they positively refuse any of the people the privilege of meeting with them, so on the contrary they forbid the people to assemble without a preacher being present. Many of the members have lately been excluded the societies at the entire will of the preachers because they dared to assemble by *themselves*, to exchange their sentiments on their present grievances. For the conference by an *express law* forbids any person to call a meeting, print any book or paper, or do any thing new of a public nature, without having first obtained the consent of the preachers.

Since Mr. Wesley's death the preachers have received about £. 40,000. from the people, nearly one third of which sum is by the sale of books, and the rest by annual collections made throughout the kingdom.

—All

* By this is meant the original choice of Preachers, and not their annual appointment.

—All these collections are carried by the preachers from the societies to the general meeting or conference, and no accounts of these sums have ever been taken by the stewards or remitted to the conference by any one.—The preachers have often been remonstrated with, for this imprudent conduct but hitherto in vain.—The conference also absolutely refuses to give any account of a great part of this money, and the few accounts they have pretended to give are extremely unsatisfactory and contradictory.

In consequence of the general dissatisfaction that prevails among the people from the above circumstances, a number of delegates sent from different societies assembled at Leeds on the first of August last, for the purpose of remonstrating with the conference on these grievances, and to demand that in future the delegates of the people should be permitted to assemble with them. To this reasonable request the preachers gave a positive refusal, and afterwards gave the delegates to understand that they should not be admitted into the smaller or district meetings; but that they should be excluded from them as formerly.—After this the delegates willing to meet the preachers as far as possible and to remove every obstacle to peace, requested that the preachers would suffer them to meet by themselves in a separate room, and from thence give their advice when any new law was made, or any business transacted that respected the people. But the conference positively refused this also, *they absolutely refused to have any communication with the people, or admit them into any of their assemblies on any plan whatever.* On these considerations the dissatisfied societies declare they will never submit to the present form of government, but are determined to resist on what they think are rational and scriptural grounds.

But as the trustees of the Chapels are charged with dishonesty, in having resolved to act agreeably to the wishes of the people and in opposition to the preachers; it is necessary that these circumstances should be particularly noticed. Soon after the commencement of methodism it was judged right the better to support the itinerant plan, that

that all chapels should be held in trust for the conference. But it may be considered as fortunate for the cause of religious liberty, that the law will not recognize a number of ministers calling themselves a Methodist Conference as a body capable of accepting a conveyance of real estate or landed property. The conference is therefore entirely set aside by law though expressed in all such deeds. This determination is agreeable to reason and equity. Our legislature foreseeing the abuses this would occasion, that it must necessarily lead to endless perplexity and litigation, wisely refuses to acknowledge any such corporation as the methodist conference.—The methodists have certainly the greatest cause to rejoice in this wise determination of our law; which in the present case is so much in favour of the people.—They by this are prevented from becoming a baneful and detestable hierarchy, a calamity that was rushing upon them like a flood, and would soon have overwhelmed them with its full tide of human policy, and the whole train of corruptions that are the natural consequences of it. The trustees therefore positively avow that it is their determination to be governed in all things respecting their chapels by the will of the people: and whenever the sentiments of those persons that from the length of time that they have been members of the societies, may be considered as competent judges of the points in dispute shall be properly obtained; they are determined to be governed by them in the future disposal of the chapels. But the trustees are calumniated with having taken the advantage of an error, or a defect in the law, and of having acted contrary to their original engagements. To this it may be answered, no person could ever suppose that the Chapels were held in trust for the conference, or for an assembly, by whatever name it might be called under all the changes, or forms that such an assembly might think proper to adopt. The conference is already so altered, that it is by no means the same as to its laws, and several parts of its government: * that it was at Mr. Wesley's death. By the same rule it may make other changes, and deviate in the fullest sense from its original system. But that the trustees

* District Meetings are new institutions, in the forming of which the people were never consulted.

tees are obliged to follow the preachers in all their changes, and pay the conference full obedience, though it may desert its former constitution; and that they are bound to acquiesce with it implicitly in all things, is an axiom, that will ever be rejected by all persons of proper reflection, as involving in it, the greatest absurdities. As to the trustees opposing the preachers, it will easily be observed they oppose them on such grounds, as are the most reasonable, equitable and scriptural. The trustees only demand, that the meetings of the preachers shall not be held in secrecy, as they have hitherto been; they request only, the admission by their delegates into these meetings, to give their voice in the constructing of their own laws in the choice of their own ministers,* and to inspect into the expenditure of their own money, and when this is obtained, the contention is at an end.

If after this avowal the trustees are still stigmatized with having acted arbitrarily and unjustly, they then call on the dissatisfied persons to declare publicly, in clear and definite terms, on what grounds *they say* the preachers are rejected by the trustees, and when they complain of the trustees having shut the Nottingham, or other Chapels against them; they ought in justice, at the same time, to take notice how the preachers have first rejected the delegates of the people at Leeds, and have absolutely refused to have any communication with them. The trustees insist on the grounds of this dispute being stated by the dissatisfied party themselves, and in such a manner as not only to be understood by the Methodists, but they demand an explanation in such general and unequivocal terms as will easily be understood by all men. What can the preachers say in their own behalf, when they are charged with refusing these most reasonable demands of the people. The people simply declare, "admit us into your Meetings, that we may be consulted in forming the Laws, by which we are governed, let us together with you, audit the accounts and dictate in the expenditure of our own money, let us be consulted in the choice of our own ministers, † and we are again united to you more firmly than ever."

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* † See Note Page four.

Will the preachers declare to the world and in the face of all men, that they will not be united again to their brethren on these scriptural and reasonable terms. If they do, how will mankind believe such to be ministers of the Gospel of *Peace*. The trustees and the people wish to be united to them again on the most rational and permanent foundation. They wish to wipe every stigma from the preachers by bearing with them their share, in all important transactions; they would take from them at least, a part of that heavy load of responsibility that is daily encreasing and presses hard upon them, and vindicate them in the sight of all men; and the preachers might then have on all occasions, the happiness of making the Apostolic appeal. Ye yourselves are witnesses how justly and unblameably we have behaved ourselves amongst you.

NOTTINGHAM, }
 September 14, 1797. }